

JOHN STROHM.

LETTERS

ON

***MASONRY,***

ADDRESSED TO

**WILLIAM L. STONE, ESQ.**

OF NEW YORK,

BY

**JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.**

**LATE PRESIDENT**

OF THE

**UNITED STATES.**

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# LETTERS

ON

# MASONRY,

BY

## JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

We insert below a series of four letters, addressed to one of Editors of this paper four weeks ago, by the late President of the United States, upon the exciting subject of Masonry. Their publication has been thus delayed by the directions of the distinguished author himself. Apprehending, probably, that their earlier publication might be imputed to a desire to influence the pending Presidential election, he requested that they might be privately retained until the close of the contest. Although the votes of the Electoral Colleges have not been cast, yet the State elections are now over, and the ultimate result can in no way be affected by the perusal of these letters. They are written with the wonted ingenuity, power and spirit of the Ex-President, and will doubtless be read with great interest by the public.—N. Y. Com. Adv.

### LETTER NO. I.

QUINCY, 25th August, 1832.

*Wm. L. Stone Esq. New-York.*

DEAR SIR.—In my last letter I observed, with the freedom and candor which I thought due to you as the best return I could make for the honour and obligation you had conferred upon me, by addressing to me your letters upon Masonry and Anti-Masonry, that there were many things in the book which I did not see as you did. Some further explanation is due from me upon the subject. The principal objects of your book were two. First, to vindicate the character of an eminent and illustrious citizen of New York, the late Governor of the State De Witt Clinton, from the opprobrium cast upon him, of having been personally and deeply concerned in the murder of Morgan; and, secondly to prove by a fair and impartial statement of the *abuses* to which the Masonic Institutions have been perverted, that they ought to be voluntarily surrendered and abolished.

These objects were just and laudable. They are in your volume faithfully pursued; nor is there in the execution of your plan, any thing in the Letters unsuitable or redundant. You observe in the first Letter, that it is no part of your design to

write a vindication of Free Masonry as such,—but to describe Free Masonry as you received, understood, and practised it yourself, and as it has been received, understood and practised by hundreds of virtuous and intelligent men, with whom you have associated in the Lodge Room.

To this the first ten Letters are devoted, and they are in my estimation not less valuable than those which succeed them.—But as Bishop Watson wrote an apology for the Bible, I trust you will not consider me as intending any disparagement to that part of your work, if I consider it in the light of an apology for Free Masonry, as received, understood, and practised by yourself and many others. In that light it is exceedingly well adapted to its purpose. It is the only rational *plea* for the institution that I have seen, since this controversy began; for all the other defences of the handmaid which have come to my knowledge have smacked too much of the obligation to come to the aid of a distressed brother, and extricate him from his difficulties *right or wrong*, to pass for any other than aggravations of the Morgan murder crimes.

You have taken all the degrees to, and including that of the Knight Templar. The Oaths, Obligations and Penalties, as

administered to, and understood by you, contained nothing incompatible with your duties to your country and your kind. Whatever there might be in them, apparently incongruous with the prior and paramount duties of the citizen and Christian, was explained and given in charge in such a manner as to be made entirely subordinate to them. The obligations, as understood by you, are all auxiliaries to Christian benevolence and patriotism, and so they are undoubtedly understood by multitudes of masons in all parts of the United States. That they are otherwise understood also by multitudes of the *worthy* brethren of the craft (worthy according to the *masonic* meaning of the word,) is apparent in every page of your book.

In your third Letter, p. 23. you allude to an opinion which I once expressed to you in the following terms:—"You, sir, have assured me the obligation supposed to be administered in conferring the first degree, is quite enough, in your view, to establish the wicked character of the Institution."

Whether I did make use of terms quite so strong in the freedom of unrestrained conversation, or whether your reference to it is by inference of your own, from words not quite so comprehensive, is not material. The sentiment which I do recollect to have expressed, and which is rooted in my conviction was, "that the entered apprentice's oath, obligation and annexed penalty, was in itself *vicious*--and as such ought never be administered by man to man." That no explanation of it could take away its essentially immoral character--and that the Institution of Free Masonry requiring absolutely the administration of it to every candidate for admission, necessarily shared in its immorality.

In saying this, I disclaim all intentions of censure upon any individual who has ever taken this oath. I consider, it according to its own import--stripped of all warrant of authority from the great names of illustrious men who may have taken it.

My objections to it are these.

First: That it is an extra-judicial oath and as such contrary to the laws of the land.

Secondly: That it is a violation of the precept of Jesus Christ--*Swear not at all.*

Thirdly: That this oath pledges the candidate, in the name of God, that he will always hail, forever conceal, and never reveal any of the *secret arts, parts or points of the mysteries* "of free masonry to any person under the canopy of heaven, except it shall be a true and lawful mason, or within the body of a just and regular lodge of such; and not unto him or them until after due trial, strict examination, or by the lawful information of a brother, I shall have found him or them as justly and lawfully entitled to the same as I am, myself."

The arts, parts, points and *mysteries* of masonry, are afterwards in the oath denominated the *secrets of the craft*.--These are all general and indefinite terms. The candidate, when he takes the oath, is kept in total ignorance of what these *secrets of the craft* consist. *He knows not the nature and extent of the oath he takes.* He is sworn to keep secret, *he knows not what.* The assurance that it is not to interfere with any of his duties, is but a mockery, when the administration of the oath itself is a violation of law.

He swears to reveal the secrets of the craft to no person under the canopy of Heaven; *except* to a brother mason or a lodge. The single exception expressed is an exclusion of all others. There is no exception for the authority of law or for the confession enjoined upon the Catholic brethren by their religion. I use this illustration to show, that the intrinsic import of the oath, is incompatible with law, civil and religious.

Now what these secrets of the Craft are, to the keeping of which, the candidate, thus ignorant of their import, is sworn, is never defined. They are differently understood, by different Masons. The oaths, obligations and penalties themselves have until very recently been understood, I believe, universally, to form a part of these secrets. Those of the first three degrees were first revealed by the publication of Morgan's book; those of the subsequent degrees to that of the thrice illustrious order of the Cross, were divulged by the Convention of the seceding Masons at Le Roy on the 4th of July, 1828. Those in Morgan's book I understand to be admitted on all hands to be correct. But with



regard to the obligations of the Red Cross Knights, and the Templars as disclosed by that Convention, you say that although you have received those degrees and assisted in conferring them, you know of no such obligations in any degrees. Your impression is that they must have been devised westward of Albany, and imposed upon candidates without the sanction of any governing body. You do not question the correctness of the publication of these degrees by the Convention of seceding Masons. You are *authorized to state* that when the forms of those obligations were received in the city, measures were taken by the Grand Encampment to ascertain whether any encampment under its jurisdiction had in fact ever administered any such obligations, and if so, where, and by whom they had been imposed.

It is earnestly to be hoped that the Grand Encampment will sincerely and seriously pursue this inquiry, and make known the result of their researches to the world. In the mean time, observe the inferences to be drawn from this extreme diversity of the terms and import of the obligations as administered in different Lodges Chapters, and Encampments; but *all* under the sanction of this tremendous Oath of the entered apprentice—all secured by this soul-shackling pledge, given in advance, and in ignorance of what they are to be; and all rivetted by the penalty to which I shall next advert. Fourthly;

“All this, I promise and swear—binding myself under no less penalty than that of having my throat cut across from ear to ear, my tongue torn out by its roots, and my body buried in the rough sand of the sea at low water-mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours.”

We have been told over and over again that this is understood by Masons to be merely an invocation—and the Committee of Investigation of the Legislature of Rhode Island, have gravely told the world that the explanation given by Masons to this *penalty*, is, “that I would rather have, or sooner have, my throat cut, than to reveal,” &c. It is unfortunate that this explanation is in direct contradiction to the plain and unequivocal import of the words

of the Oath. The Oath incurs the *penalty* for its violation. The explanation promises fidelity, though at the expense of life. The Oath imprecates the death of a Traitor, as a *penalty* for treachery. The explanation claims a crown of martyrdom for constancy. If Benedict Arnold had been taken in the act of treason to his country, he would have suffered no less a *penalty* than death, though not the barbarous and brutal death of the masonic obligation. When Joseph Warren suffered death on Bunker’s Hill, is there an explanatory mason who dare tell you that he suffered a *penalty*. Yet so it is, that the Masonic Oath, and its explanation, confound all moral distinctions to the degree of considering the death of a martyr and the death of a traitor as one and the same thing.

This *explanation* of the penalty annexed to the entered apprentice’s Oath, it must be acknowledged, is not ingenuous—it is not even ingenious. It is a grand hailing sign of distress; or it is a Masonic Murder of the English Language.

I say this with the less hesitation, because in your seventh letter containing your defence of the Masonic Obligations, you have disdained to take this preposterous *explanation* of the Rhode-Island Masons. You know too well the import of words. You candidly avow that the Oaths and Obligations are out of season—out of reason; and ought to be abolished. I will therefore forbear to press upon you the still grosser absurdity, of the pretended Rhode-Island explanation, when applied to the Master Mason’s and Royal Arch penalties. The Master Mason’s penalty is to have his body severed in two in the midst, and divided to the North and South, his bowels burnt to ashes in the centre, and the ashes scattered before the four winds of Heaven, *that there might not the least track or trace of remembrance remain among men or masons of so vile and perjured a wretch, as I should be.* And this, according to the Rhode-Island explanation, is to be the consequence of his dying like Hiram Abiff, rather than betray the Masonic secrets.

My fifth objection is to the horrible *ideas*, of which the penalty is composed. Even in the barbarous ages of antiquity

Homer tells you, that when Achilles dragged the dead body of Hector round the walls of Troy, it was a dishonest deed—*aei kea medeto erga*—and Plato severely censures Homer for even introducing this incident into his poem.—A mangled body after death, was a thought disgusting even to Heathens. From the very thoughts—and still more from the lips of a Christian, it should forever be excluded, like indelicacy from the mouth of a female. The Constitutions of the United States, and of Massachusetts, prohibit the infliction of cruel or unusual punishments even by the authority of the law. But no butcher would mutilate the carcass of a bullock or a swine, as the Masonic candidate swears consent to the mutilation of his own, for the breach of an absurd and senseless secret. I cannot consent to your denomination of these penalties as idle or unmeaning words. They are words of too much meaning—of hideous significancy.—The Masons are bound for their own honour to expunge them from their records forever. Would that they could be expunged from the Language, dishonoured by their introduction into its forms of speech.

I remain, very respectfully,

Your friend,

J. Q. ADAMS.

#### LETTER NO. IV.

QUINCY, August 29, 1832.

Wm. L. Stone, Esq. of New York.

DEAR SIR,

Long, and I fear, tedious as you have found my last letter, I was compelled by a reluctance at making it longer, to compress the observations in it upon the *intrinsic* nature of the Masonic *Oaths, Obligations, and Penalties*, within a compass insufficient to disclose my opinion, and the reasons upon which it is founded.

I had said to you that the Institution of Freemasonry was *vicious*, in its first step, the initiation *Oath, Obligation and Penalty* of the entered apprentice. To sustain this opinion I assigned to you five reasons—because they were:

1. Contrary to the Laws of the Land—Extra-judicially taken and administered.
2. In violation of the *positive* precepts of Jesus Christ.

3. A pledge to keep *undefined* Secrets, the Swearer being ignorant of their nature.

4. A pledge to the penalty of death for violation of the oath.

5. A pledge to a *mode* of death, cruel, unusual, unfit for utterance from human lips.

If in the statement of these five *objections*, upon principles of Law, Religion, and Morals, there be any thing unsound, I invite you to point it out. But if you contest either of my positions, I must entreat you not to *travel out of the record*.

I might ask you, not to consider it a refutation of either of these reasons, to say that you and all other honest and honorable Masons, have never so understood or practiced upon this Oath, Obligation and Penalty. The inquiry is not what your practice, or that of others has been, but what *is* the Obligation, its Oath, and its Penalty.

I must request of you to give me no *explanation*, of this Oath, Obligation and Penalty, directly contrary to their unequivocal import. That you will not explain *black* by saying that it means *white*, or even alledging that you so understand it. I particularly beg not to be told that honorable, intelligent and virtuous men, George Washington, and Joseph Warren, for example, understood that the penalty of death for Treachery, meant the death of martyrdom for fidelity.

I would willingly be spared the necessity of replying to the averment that the patterns of honor and virtue whom I have just named, with a long catalogue of such men *have* taken this oath, and bound themselves to this Obligation, under this penalty. For I might deem it proper to inquire, whether the very act of binding such men, by such Oath, to such obligation, under such penalty, is not among the *sins* of the Institution.

I must ask you to suppose that such an Institution had never existed—that it were now to be formed, and that you were one out of ten or twenty, virtuous and intelligent men, about to form a charitable, and convivial secret Association. Suppose a Committee of such a meeting appointed to draw up a constitution for the Society should report the entered Apprentice's Oath, Obligation and Penalty, as a form of initiation



for the admission of Members. I do not ask you whether you would vote for the acceptance of the Report, but what would you think of the Reporters?

I consider this as the true and only Test, of the inherent and essential character of Masonry, and it was under this conviction, that I told you that the entered Apprentice's Oath was sufficient to settle in my mind the immoral character of the Institution.

It is perhaps too much to ask of you, an explicit assent to those positions, because you may consider it an acknowledgement of error. But this is the first and fundamental consideration from which I draw the conclusion that Masonry *ought* forever to be abolished. It is wrong—essentially wrong—a seed of evil, which can never produce any good. It may perish in the ground—It may never rise to bear fruit; but whatever fruit it does bear, must be rank poison—It can never prove a blessing, but by its barrenness.

My objections to this *seminal principle* of Masonry, apply in all their force to the single Obligation, the form of which is given in the appendix to your Volume, page 3, where it is stated to have been the only obligation, taken for all three degrees, so late as 1730, when only three degrees of Masonry were known. The Oath is in fewer words, but more comprehensive, for the obligation is to keep "*the secrets or secrecy of Masons or Masonry.*" There is indeed a qualification in the promise not to write, point, mark, &c. which seems to keep the obligation within the verge of the Law. For the promise is to reveal nothing whereby the Secret might be *unlawfully* obtained. The penalty is also death not for constancy, but for treachery, "so that there be no resemblance of me among masons."

This oath, obligation and penalty, the only one taken in all the degrees of Masonry known but one century ago, is the prolific Parent of all the Oaths, Obligations and penalties, since invented, and of the whole progeny of crimes descended from them. The natural and unavoidable tendency of such obligation, is the multiplication of its kind. This tendency is among the most obvious causes which have led to the interdiction of all such

oaths and obligations by the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the moral law. The obligation is to keep undefined secrets. As they are undefined in the obligation itself, there is nothing in the Constitution of Masonry to define them, or to secure uniformity either in the secrets or the obligations. Every lodge may so vary the secrets, obligations and penalties, and accordingly they have been so varied that scarcely any two adhering masons give the same account of them. Almost the only defence of Freemasonry after the publication of the Books of David Bernard and Avery Allyn, consisted in efforts to discredit them, by denying that the Oaths, Obligations and Penalties were truly stated by them. A secret Institution in three degrees; the secret of each degree being withheld from the members of the degrees inferior to it, is a perpetual temptation to the initiated to multiply the secrets and the degrees. Thus it is that the Lodges have grown into Chapters—the Chapters into Encampments—the Encampments into Consistories; and so long ago as December, 1802, the Grand Inspector of the United States of America issued at Charleston, South Carolina, a Circular announcing the existence and the names of thirty three degrees of Masonry.

The secrets, to the keeping of which the entered Apprentice is sworn, are *indefinite*. In genuine Masonry, when revealed to him, he finds them *frivolous*. You acknowledge that your first feeling upon receiving them was disappointment. So must it be with every reflecting intelligent man, nor is it conceivable that any such entered Apprentice, on leaving the Lodge after his admission, should fail to have observed with pain and mortification, the contrast between the awful solemnity of the oath which he has taken, and the extreme insignificance of the secret revealed to him. It is to meet this unavoidable impression that the Institution is graduated. The lure of curiosity is held out and its attractive power is sinewed, by the very disappointment which the apprentice has experienced. He takes the degrees of Fellow Craft and Master Mason, and still finds disappointment—still finds himself bound by tremendous oaths, to keep trifling and frivolous secrets. The practice of the Institution is deceptive and fraudulent.

lent. It holds out to him a promise which it never performs. Its promise is Light—its performance is darkness.

But it introduces him to intimate, confidential, and exclusive relations, with a select and limited circle of other men—and to the same confidential and exclusive relations, with great multitudes of men, belonging to every civilized nation throughout the globe. The Entered Apprentice's Oath, is merely an oath of secrecy—but the candidate who takes it has pledged himself, by his application for admission, to conform to all the ancient established usages and customs of the fraternity.—And the charge of the master given upon the Bible, compass and square, presents him with three precious jewels, a *listening ear*—a *silent tongue*—and a *faithful heart*—all, of course, exclusively applicable to the *secrets* revealed to him—and he is told that the listening ear teaches him to listen to the instructions of the Worshipful Master; but more especially to the cries of a worthy, distressed brother;—and that the faithful heart teaches him to be faithful to the instructions of the Worshipful Master at all times, but more especially to keep and conceal the secrets of Masonry, and *those of a brother*, when given to him in charge as such, that they may remain as secure and inviolable in his (the Entered Apprentice's) breast, as in his (the brother's) own. Two check words are also presented to him—*truth* and *union*—the explanation of which concludes that the heart and tongue of Free Masons, join in promoting *each other's* welfare, and rejoicing in each other's prosperity.

Thus the essential nature of the Entered Apprentice's oath, preceded by his pledge to conform to all the established usages and customs of the fraternity, and followed by the charge of the Master, is *secret* and *exclusive* favor, assistance and fidelity to the *brotherhood* and *brothers* of the *Craft*.

Now combine together the disappointment which every intelligent accepted Mason must feel at the puerility of the secrets revealed to him, compared with the appalling solemnity of the oath exacted from him for the purchase of his lamb skin apron, and the secret ties with which he is linked himself with multitudes of other

men, exclusively to favor, assist and be faithful to each other, and acknowledge that the temptation to make the secrets more important, and to turn them to better account to the craft, must be irresistible. Judge this system a priori, without reference to any of the consequences which it has produced, and say if human ingenuity could invent an engine better suited to conspiracy of any kind. The Entered Apprentice returns from the Lodge, with his curiosity stimulated, his imagination bewildered, and his reason disappointed.—The mixture of Religion & Morality, blended with falsehood and imposture, which pervade all the ceremonies of initiation, is like arsenic mingled up with balm.

“Most dangerous

“Is that Temptation which doth lead us on  
“To Sin, in loving Virtue.”

If the candidate has been educated to a sincere and heartfelt reverence for religion and the Bible, and if he exercises his reason, he *knows* that all the tales of Jachin & Boaz, of Solomon's Temple, of Hiram Abiff and Jubela, Jubelo, and Jubelum, are impostures; poisons poured into the perennial fountain of truth—traditions exactly resembling those reprobated by Jesus Christ, as making the Word of God of none effect. If, as in this age but too often happens, he enters the lodge a sceptic, the use of the Bible there, if it have any effect upon him, will turn him out a confirmed infidel.—The sincere and rational believer in the Gospel, can find no confirmation of his faith in the unwarrantable uses made of the Holy Scriptures to shed an unction of their sanctity around the fabulous fabric of Freemasonry; while the reprobate miscreant will be taught the uses to which fraud and secrecy may turn the lessons of piety and virtue, inculcated in the sublimest effusions of divine inspiration. In those scriptures we are told, that when “the children of Israel did *SECRETLY* those things that were not right against the Lord their God,” they became idolaters, and were carried into captivity. Their cities then were soon filled with a mongrel race of Babylonians and Assyrians, who perverted the Word of God with the impostures of Paganism; burnt their children in fire, to the Gods of Sepharvaim, and “*feared* the Lord, and *served* their



graven images"—an emblem of Free Masonry, far more illustrative of its character, than the Tragedy of Hiram Abiff.

The Entered Apprentice's Oath, is, therefore, in its own nature, a seminal principle of conspiracy--and the objection applies to the only oath originally taken in all the degrees of Free Masonry at its first institution. The *ostensible* primitive purposes of Free Masonry, were all comprised in *good-fellowship*. But to good-fellowship, whether of labor or refreshment, neither secresy, nor oath, nor penalties, are necessary or congenial. In the original institution of Freemasonry, there was then an ostensible and a secret object, and by the graduation of the order, the means were supplied of converting it to any *evil* purpose of associated power, screened from the danger of detection. Hence all the bitter fruits which the institution has borne in Germany, in France, in Mexico, and lastly, in this our beloved country. Nor could they have failed to be produced in Great Britain, but that by sharp and biting statutes, they have been confined within the limit of the ostensible object of the brotherhood—good fellowship.

I am, with much respect, dear sir, your friend and servant.

J. Q. ADAMS.

### LETTER III.

QUINCY, September 6, 1832.

Wm. L. Stone, Esq. New York.

DEAR SIR,

In my two preceding letters you have seen my objections, drawn from the fountains of Law, Religion and Morals, against the first step of freemasonry, the *Oath*, with its obligation and penalty, administered to the Entered Apprentice, at his initiation. You will certainly understand, that in this denunciation of the *thing*, it is not my intention to include a charge against any individual who has ever taken the oath—as on the other hand I exclude all palliation or justification of it upon the mere authority of the great names of men by whom it has been taken.

It is a pledge of faith from man to man, solemnized by an appeal to God and fortified by the express assent of the swearer, to undergo the penalty of death and muti-

lation, at, or after death, for its violation. Such it is in itself, and no explanation can, without doing violence to the natural connection between thought and language, take away this its essential and unequivocal import.

The objections are :—1. To the oath. 2. To the promise. 3. To the penalty.

1. *To the Oath*—as a double violation of the law of the Land, and of the law of God. Upon this, there appears by your seventh letter, to be very little, if any, difference of opinion between you and me. The principles assumed and admitted in the introduction to your seventh letter, are unquestionably correct with reference to law, to religion, and morals—and it is equally clear that they are all disregarded in the administration of the masonic oaths. It is a vice of the institution, which no example can justify, and which no sophistry can extenuate.—Your acknowledgment is magnanimous—your argument is unanswerable.

But if the administration of the oath is of itself a violation of the laws of both of God & man, as well by him who administers as by him who takes it, is it not a further mockery of both, for the master, in the very act of transgressing the laws, and of suborning the candidate to transgress them with him, to say to him "this obligation is not intended to interfere with your duty to yourself, your neighbor, your country, or your God." Is there not falsehood and hypocrisy superadded to the breach of law, & profanation of the name of God, in the injunction & explanation itself? He calls upon the candidate to perform an unlawful act—and he tells him that it is not to interfere with his religion or politics—or, with deeper duplicity, that is to interfere with none of his civil, moral, or religious duties.—This self-contradiction of word and deed, is the very essence of all sanguinary religious fanaticism. It is very the vital spark of the spirit which armed with daggers the hands of Ravallac and Balthasar Girard. Under the excruciating pangs of the torture, Ravallac to his last gasp protested that he thought he was serving God by the assassination of a King who was about to declare war against the Pope—and he signed his name to one of the interrogatories at his trial—Francis Ravallac—

Que toujours dans mon cœur  
Jesus soit le vainqueur.

"In my heart, forever, may  
"Jesus hold conquering sway."

If the murder of Henry the Fourth of France had been concerted in a Masonic Lodge Room, and the Master had administered to the perpetrator, as a part of his oath, the obligation to commit that deed, he might with just as much reason and consistency, have assured him that this oath would not interfere with his religion or politics, or with his duty to himself, his neighbor, his country, or his God, as the Master of a Masonic Lodge can now give such an assurance to a candidate for admission, before administering to him the oath of an Entered Apprentice.

## 2. To the Promise.

The promise is to keep the secrets of masonry; and never to reveal them to any human being, not already initiated. I have already objected that this promise is indefinite. The promiser knows not the nature of the secrets which he is sworn to keep.—Nor are they ever explained to him. In your 7th letter, page 71, you have explicitly stated your understanding of what the secrets were, and that you have always found your *intelligent* brethren ready to concur in that opinion. Your definition of them is so clear and satisfactory, that if it were in its very terms so explained by the Master, before administering the oath, this objection would be removed.

"The essential secrets of masonry (you say) consist in nothing more than the signs, grips, pass-words, and tokens essential to the preservation of the Society, from the inroads of imposters, together with certain symbolical emblems, the technical terms appertaining to which served as a sort of universal language, by which the members of the fraternity could distinguish each other, in all places and countries where lodges were instituted, and conducted like those of the United States."

IN NOTHING MORE. But no such explanation is ever given to the candidate for admission, when the oath is administered to him, or ever afterwards—and you very candidly admit that this is not the understanding entertained of the Secrets of Masonry, by 'foolish brethren.' Now herein consists my objection to the promise. It

is to keep secret, he knows not what—he never knows—and this indefiniteness is essential to preserve the graduation of the Order. It is essential to keep alive the *curiosity* of the candidate, who at each degree that he attains, is always comforted in his disappointment by the assurance that there is in the next degree, a secret worth knowing.

If it be said that the exaction of a promise to keep a secret must necessarily precede the communication of the secret itself, and that therefore no promissor can know in advance what it is that he pledges himself to keep secret, I reply that my objection is to the indefiniteness, not only of the secret itself, but of the promise.—Jurors in courts of law are sworn to keep secret the councils of their fellows, and their own. The Juror to be sure knows not what the councils of his fellows will be, when he swears to keep them secret, but he knows that they cannot extend beyond the line of their duty to decide the matter committed to them—and there is nothing indefinite in the obligation from the moment when it becomes binding upon him. The masonic swearer, is ignorant of the extent both of his oath and of his promise—and after his admission, he still is never informed what are the secrets which he has been sworn to keep.

In your enumeration of the essential secrets of the Order, you do not include the Oaths themselves, as administered to the candidates for admission. These, therefore, are no secrets which any mason is bound to keep. But has this been the understanding of *intelligent* masons heretofore? Why then have the forms of the oaths never been made public in the masonic books, published by authority, or without objection from the order? Why have they become so different in different places? Why in all the trials which have arisen from the murder of Morgan, and in which evidence of the forms of those oaths, obligations and penalties was essential to the issue, have not authenticated copies of them been produced in court by the masonic witnesses themselves? In Massachusetts, Vermont, in Rhode Island, there have been numerous *defences* of masonry, by individual masons and masonic lodges,



very indignantly denying, that *they* ever took or administered the obligations with the words 'Murder and Treason not excepted,' and generally denying that they were under any obligations contrary to the laws of God, or of their country: but anxious as they have all been to fix the charge of *slander* upon Avery Allyn, and David Bernard and to make the world believe that the forms of masonic oaths, obligations and penalties, disclosed in their books, were fabrications of their own, never used by any masonic body—still in no single instance have they ever produced or certified to the oaths, obligations and penalties, as used or administered by themselves, until the investigation instituted last winter, by the Legislature of Rhode Island, and conducted in a spirit so friendly to masonry, and so adverse to antimasonry, that it could scarcely have been more so, had every member of the investigating committee but one, been himself an adhering mason. In that investigation, the committee, like yourself, considered the secrets of masonry to consist of the signs, grips, pass-words and emblematical figures of speech—and no more—and with regard to these, they indulged the brotherhood, by not inquiring into them, by interrogation of adhering masons—giving notice, that they should take all these profound mysteries, to have been correctly set forth in the books of Allyn and Bernard, unless positive testimony to the contrary should be voluntarily offered by adhering masons.

But the committee did require testimony from the adhering masons, of the oaths, obligations and penalties, as taken in the lodges, chapters and encampments in Rhode Island, and it was given. The appendix to the report of the committee contains this evidence, and authenticates upon full, adhering masonic authority, the oaths, obligations, and penalties, as taken and administered in Rhode Island, of eleven degrees, from the entered apprentice to the royal master.

It is therefore to the indefiniteness of the promise in this authenticated obligation of the entered apprentice, that I take my first objection—and this indefiniteness is not only intrinsic in the terms of the obligation itself, but is aggravated by the

previous pledge of the candidate to conform to the established usages and customs of the order, and by the charge given by the master who administers the oath, which charge enjoins it upon the candidate as a duty to obey the instructions of the master of the lodge, and to keep the secrets of a brother mason, committed to him as such. The obligation includes also the pledge to keep secret the transactions of the lodge—without exception.

There are thus, according to the understanding of the Rhode Island Masons, and to yours, three distinct classes of secrets to which every accepted mason was bound—first to the secrets of masonry, consisting only of the signals of communication, tokens of mutual recognition between the members of the fraternity. Secondly, the secrets of brother masons communicated as such—and thirdly, the transactions in the lodge. And of these, you and they consider the first class only as essential to the order. But what is the principle of this distinction? None such is found in the oaths themselves, nor in any of the masonic Books, nor in the charge given by the master to the candidate for admission. Does the promise of secrecy given by the entered Apprentice extend to the *transaction of the lodge*? It does not in the terms of the oath. It does not by the practice of the Rhode Island lodges; for they enjoy this portion of the secrets by their by-law upon the penalty of *expulsion*, but the same by-laws contains no provision whatever for the violation of the essential secrets. In all the oaths and obligations *subsequent* to the degree of the entered apprentice, the promise includes the secrets of a brother mason, communicated as such but not the transactions of the lodge, chapter or encampment. These are deemed binding only by virtue of the other promises of the candidates, that he will conform to the customs and regulations of the fraternity. But this distinction itself proves that in masonic contemplation, the obligation to keep secret the transactions of the lodge is not the obligation, with oath and penalty, to keep the essential secrets of the craft. For disclosing the transactions of the lodge, the penalty is expulsion. But the by-laws contain no such penalty for disclosing the secrets of the craft. What



s this but a recognition that the penalty for divulging the secrets of the craft, is different from the penalty for revealing the transactions of the lodge;—that is a crime of much higher order, sanctioned by the oath with its penalty, and for which it would be alike inconsistent and absurd to provide by a by-law or regulation of the lodge.

My first objection to the *promise* of the Entered Apprentice's obligation, is its *indefiniteness*—and this objection extends to all the obligations of the subsequent degrees, and to the institution itself, which is thereby rendered a ready engine of conspiracy for any evil purpose.

A second objection to the *promise*, is its *universality*. It is to keep the secrets of the craft, and never to reveal them to *any person under the Canopy of Heaven*. The single exception has no other effect than to exclude all other exceptions. It is confined to initiated brothers and regular lodges, to whom the Entered Apprentice of course reveal nothing, they being already in possession of the secrets which he promises to keep. The promise therefore, is never to reveal the secrets of masonry to *any person under the Canopy of Heaven*. I shall pursue this subject in another letter.

J. Q. ADAMS.

#### LETTER IV.

QUINCY, Sept. 1832.

Wm. L. Stone, Esq. New York.

DEAR SIR—

The second objection to the *promise* of the Entered Apprentice's obligation, is its universality. The candidate swears that he will never reveal any of the undesignated "arts, parts or points of the mysteries of Free Masonry, to *any person under the Canopy of Heaven*". This promise, like the administration of the oath, is, in its terms, contrary to the law of the land. The laws of this and every civilized country, make it the duty of every citizen to testify the whole truth of facts, deemed by legislative bodies or judicial tribunals, material to the issue of the investigation before them. It is also the duty of a good citizen to denounce and *reveal* to the authorities established to execute the laws against criminals, any secret crimes of which he has in any manner acquired the

knowledge. Now there is nothing in the *arts, parts or points of the mysteries of Free Masonry*, which in the trial of a judicial cause, or in an investigation of a Legislative Assembly, may not be justly deemed material to the issue before the court or the legislature. Of its materiality, the judges, or the legislators, have the exclusive right to decide. No witness, called before a court of justice, or an authorized committee of a legislature, can refuse to answer any question put to him by the court or the committee, on the ground that *he* deems it immaterial to the trial before them. The principle becomes more glaringly obvious, when applied to the *promise* never to reveal the secrets of a brother mason, communicated as such, contained in the Master Mason's oath.—But the principle is identically the same. The Entered Apprentice promises never to reveal to any person under the canopy of Heaven, *that* which the laws of his country *may*, the next day after he makes the promise, make it his duty to reveal to any court of justice before which he may be summoned to appear, or to any committee of the legislature of the state in which he resides, or the Union. The promise is therefore unlawful, by its universality.

You will remember that I am maintaining the position that the obligation, under oath and penalty, administered to and taken by the Entered Apprentice, is *in itself* essentially vicious. I now state the promise in the words universally admitted to be used in that ceremony. Do you deny that they contain an unlawful promise? Yes, say you, because the candidate is told by the master who administers the oath, that "he is expressly to understand, that "nothing therein contained is to interfere "with his political or religious principles; "with his duty to God, or the laws of his "country." And you, and all honest and worthy Masons, take and administer the oath with this understanding. Well then—the promise is in its terms contrary to the law of the land, but you take and administer it with *tacit* reservation, furnished to you not by the action of your own understanding, but by the previous notification of the master who administers the oath to you. So, and so only you say, the terms of the promise are to be construed.

But in the first place, this is not a question of construction, but a question of mental reservation. The words are plain and unequivocal; but you pronounce them with a reservation, that the promise shall bind you to nothing contrary to law. Now what possible reason or justification can there be for exacting a promise under oath, the real meaning of which is totally different from that of the terms in which it is couched? You swear a man to one thing, and you tell him it means another. But, secondly, how far does your exception extend? You say the promise extends only to the essential secrets of Masonry, and to the lawful transactions in the lodges, and to the secrets of Masons not criminal—the former of which you consider of not the least consequence to the world, but essential for the preservation of the society. The secrecy of transactions in the lodges you believe to be merely conventional; and the promise of keeping the secrets of a brother Mason, as cancelled, when the secret confided to you by him is of a crime committed by himself.

Now all these exceptions resolve themselves into the tacit reservation, authorized by the declaration of the Master, before administering the oath, that it contains nothing contrary to the law. If the oath is taken with this reservation, it applies equally to the promise to keep the *essential* secrets of the order and to all the others. And, therefore, a Freemason, summoned before the committee of a Legislature, or a Court of Justice, is bound not less to disclose the grips, signs, due guards, and tokens, than he is to divulge the crimes of a brother Mason, known to him.

The simple question I take to be this: I suppose a Freemason to be summoned before a legislative committee or assembly, or judicial tribunal, to testify. Is he or is he not bound to answer any interrogatory put to him by their authority, and which they require of him to answer, respecting *the essential secrets of the craft*? If he is, how can these secrets be kept, and of what avail are all the oaths, administered to Masonic candidates, whether with or without penalty? If he is not, then the obligation of the Masonic oath supersedes the obligation of the law of the land.

And if the Masonic oath of secrecy is payable to the law of the land, with regard to the *mysteries of the craft*, where is the principle which restores the supremacy of the law, to require the disclosure of Masonic crimes? The Masonic oath makes no discrimination between the secrets—the promise is to keep them all. The declaration of the Master that there is nothing *unlawful* in the oath, makes no discrimination—it applies to all or it applies to none.

With this view of the subject, you will perceive that I deem it altogether immaterial to the argument, whether the words 'murder and treason not excepted,' are or are not included in the Royal Arch Mason's promise of secrecy—whether promises to espouse the cause of a brother Mason, right or wrong, or not—and whether the words, 'and they left to my own election,' are or are not an innovation on the Master Mason's oath. But when you ask me, as an act of justice, to believe that should a brother Mason tell you a secret that he had robbed a store, you would very speedily make the matter public in the police office, I must, while you cheerfully and sincerely believing you observe, that it would be at the expense of the very explicit import of the Master Mason's oath. By that oath, the Master Mason promises to keep the secrets of his brother Master Mason, as secure and inviolable as if they were in his own breast. 'murder and treason excepted.' That excepting two specific enumerated crimes. What, then, is the meaning of this exception?—and why are they excepted? The naming of them, emphatically leaves all other crimes, included in the *promise*, excluded from the exception. The Master Mason's promise does therefore, by the plain import of its terms, pledge him to keep secret the knowledge of any crime committed by a brother Master Mason and communicated to him as a Master secret; other than the two specified names; and if you should be in the unfortunate condition of having such a secret communicated to you, and should give notice of it at the Police office, you would discharge your duty to your country, by considering your Masonic promise null and void. For here is the dilemma.



if the Masonic promises are *all* made with the tacit reservation, that *nothing* contrary to law is understood to be included in them, then the exception of Murder and Treason in the Master Mason's oath is not only superfluous, but deceptive ; since it admits to two specific crimes, the exception already referred to, of all crimes whatever ; and if the Masonic promises are made without the reserved exception of all unlawful things, then the exception of Murder and Treason, from the secrets which the Master Mason pledges himself to keep, leaves all other crimes as distinctly under the shelter of the promise, as if they had been included in it expressly by name.

### 3. To the Penalty.

#### Death by Torture and Mutilation.

I have in a former letter exposed the fallacy—I must say, the disingenuous fallacy, of the attempt to defend this part of the Masonic Obligation in the late Rhode Island legislative investigation. In the tale of 'January and May,' when the doting, blind and abused husband, by the miraculous doing of the King of the Fairies, received instantaneous restoration of sight, to witness his own dishonor ; the Queen of the Fairies, with equal promptitude, suggests to the guilty wife, an EXPLANATION. The Masonic brotherhood of Rhode Island, are as ready to take a suggestion from the Queen of Fairies, as the youthful and studious May. The Committee of the Rhode Island Legislature was composed of men too intelligent to be duped like Wittol January, yet were they contented to be told, and to believe, that the penalty of death, for revealing a secret, was politically one & the same thing as the heroic martyrdom of death *rather* than to reveal a secret. All Language is a system of Logic. All Language is a system of symbols. All figurative Language is Transposition. The words may say one thing and intend another—but translation must not confound moral distinctions, and Irony and allusions are the only figures of speech which are permitted in human intercourse "wash an Ethiop white."

Our own exposition of this penalty is as candid, and more plausible. You consider the words in which the penalty is expressed as *unmeaning*—because the

candidate has been told that the obligation contains nothing contrary to law ; and because the society neither possesses nor exercises the power to authorize the execution of the penalty. This, of course, considers the penalty as null and void.

And so one would think it *must* be considered by every fair-minded and honorable man. And why, then, do fair-minded and honorable men adhere to this penalty?

Is it worthy of fair-minded and honorable men to use words full of sound and fury, signifying nothing—to use them as the sanction to a promise?—to use them with an appeal to the everlasting God? Are the words so charming in themselves—is the thought conveyed by them to the mind so irresistibly fascinating that even now twelve hundred fair-minded and honorable men of Massachusetts declare in the face of their country and of mankind that they will not renounce the use of them? O, say not what fair-minded and honorable will not do!—Twelve hundred men of Massachusetts, men of fair and honorable minds, even now, after all the arts, parts and points of the mysteries of Freemasonry have been revealed and published to the world, nay, after the very check word transmitted to them for their protection against the intrusion of Book Masons upon their mysteries, had been divulged with all the rest—after all this, twelve hundred Masons of Massachusetts have declared that they will not renounce or abandon the mysteries of Freemasonry ;—that they will still continue to hold their meetings, to Tyle their Lodges, to brandish their drawn swords for the exclusion of Cowans and Eavesdroppers, and to swear the knave or simpleton who will henceforth submit to take the Oath, never to reveal, never to write, print, cut, carve, paint, stain, or engrave, secrets known to every one who will take the trouble to read—secrets in their own estimation, insignificant and puerile—secrets, in the estimation of great multitudes of their fellow citizens, disgusting and blasphemous ;—that they will continue to swear the candidate to this Oath of secrecy, under no less a penalty than that of having his throat cut across from ear to ear, his tongue torn out by the roots, and his body buried in the rough sand of the sea, at low water mark, where



the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours. But that they will take care to explain to him, that this means he will rather die than reveal to any person under the canopy of heaven these secrets known to all the world; that his Oath is not to interfere with his religion or politics, nor with any of his duties to his neighbour, his country, or his God. For thus speaks the mystic Muse of Masonry:—

And many a Holy text, around she strews  
To teach Masonic Moralists to die.

Have I proved the entered Apprentice's Oath is a breach of Law, human & divine? That its *promise* is undefined, unlawful, and nugatory? That its *penalty* is barbarous, inhuman—murderous in its terms, and in its least obnoxious sense null and void? If so—my task is done. The first step in Freemasonry is a false step. The entered Apprentice's Obligation is a crime—and like all vicious usages should be abolished. JOHN Q. ADAMS.

